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Remarks to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy
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Thank you Mr. Levitt for the kind introduction. I am honored to have this opportunity to speak to you today . . . My remarks today will follow a simple progression. First I will cover the basics of the United States Special Operations Command. My second topic is USSOCOM's role in the current operating environment. Finally, I will talk about the future environment and how I see USSOCOM posturing for success. At the end of my remarks, I look forward to an informal dialogue with you on your observations of how these topics relate to American foreign policy in the Near East.

Let's begin with a brief history of how USSOCOM came to be and the basic architecture and functions of the command, a "SOCOM 101" of sorts.

The Department of Defense activated the United States Special Operations Command on April 16th, 1987 at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. This new unified command was created as directed by the Nunn-Cohen amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act of 1986, as a follow-on to the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act. Congress mandated that a four-star command be established to prepare Special Operations Forces to carry out assigned missions and, if directed by the President or Secretary of Defense, to plan for and conduct special operations.

Title 10 of the United States Code defines USSOCOM's authorities and responsibilities as both a force providing and operational headquarters. USSOCOM is provided a dedicated Major Force Program budget and specific acquisition authorities similar to a military department or a defense agency.

Before the September 11th, 2001 attacks on the United States, USSOCOM's primary focus was on its supporting command mission of organizing, training, and equipping joint special operations forces and providing fully capable forces to support the geographic combatant commanders (Central Command, European Command, Pacific Command, etc), and US Ambassadors and their country teams.

The President expanded USSOCOM's responsibilities in 2004 and then slightly modified them in 2008 so that USSOCOM is now the combatant command responsible for synchronizing the Department of Defense's planning for global operations against violent extremist organizations and networks. Note that I said synchronize "planning," not synchronize "operations." Conducting operations remains the primary responsibility of geographic combatant commanders in each of their respective areas of responsibility. USSOCOM receives, reviews, coordinates, and prioritizes all DOD plans that support the global campaign against terrorists and their networks, and then makes recommendations to the Joint Staff regarding force and resource allocations to meet global requirements.

There are 12 capability areas that have been specifically assigned to USSOCOM. They are referred to as the SOF core activities. It is not meant to imply that we are the only ones who do them, but there are tasks within each of these activity areas that are peculiar to Special

Operations Forces. These activities are: Direct Action, Special Reconnaissance, Unconventional Warfare, Foreign Internal Defense, Civil Affairs Operations, Counterterrorism, Psychological Operations, Information Operations, Counter Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, Security Force Assistance, Counterinsurgency, and other Activities specified by the President or Secretary of Defense. This list includes expected ones such as direct action and counterterrorism, but there are two that I will highlight because they, and your understanding of them, are important to our current operations. The first is Unconventional Warfare.

Unconventional Warfare is commonly misunderstood to be the opposite of conventional warfare. In fact Unconventional Warfare is strictly and doctrinally defined as those operations that are conducted through and with surrogates and paramilitary counterparts to destabilize a hostile or illegitimate government. The fundamental requirement of unconventional warfare is to stimulate and support an indigenous group that lacks the capability to challenge the hostile government on its own.

The campaign in Northern Afghanistan in the opening days of OEF was unconventional warfare. The Northern Alliance was a relatively mature, but not very capable, opposition force to the Taliban. And with the support of a relative handful of Special Forces Operational Detachment Alfa teams, 12-man Green Beret A-teams, that paramilitary force became a dominant power in Northern Afghanistan and was the main force in the march to Kabul. Unconventional Warfare is the flip side of counterinsurgency, which is what the Afghanistan campaign became after the election of a legitimate, non-hostile government.

The second core activity I'll highlight is psychological operations, a term that often engenders images of brainwashing or mind control. I prefer to describe it as "truth-telling for a purpose." Its purpose is to influence activities and behavior in ways that are useful to us and to the foreign population we're addressing. We are prohibited by law and policy from using false information in the conduct of psychological operations. Practitioners of psychological operations, or PSYOP for short, also serve as operational advisors regarding the likely impact of other military operations on a population's psyche.

As the Commander of USSOCOM, I have three overarching priorities, which can basically be summed up as mission, people, and stuff. The mission is to "deter, disrupt and defeat terrorist threats," which is, of course, the reason for the people and stuff. But under these three main priorities there are three supporting points of emphasis: Culturally attuned engagement, Interagency collaboration, and training and educating the three D warrior. Culturally attuned engagement and interagency collaboration are key to our ability to deter, disrupt and defeat terrorist threats.

The conflicts in which we are engaged are not going to be resolved by United States Special Operations Command, and they won't be solved by the Department of Defense. These conflicts are bigger than us; they will require a global effort to complete successfully. We will need to go even beyond a whole-of-government approach, to what can be called a whole-of-nation(s) approach. Too often special operations are thought of as unilateral, high-risk, one-shot raids or assaults. There are of course times when that is the case, but what is truly

“special” about special operations is the ability and to work with and through others in pursuit of mutually beneficial outcomes to unusually complex situations.

I mentioned the Three D Warrior. The complexity of the present strategic environment requires that SOF operators maintain not only the highest levels of war fighting expertise but also cultural knowledge and diplomacy skills. These “3-D Operators” are members of a multi-dimensional force prepared to lay the groundwork in the myriad Diplomatic, Development, and Defense activities that contribute to the U.S. government’s pursuit of vital national interests. Fundamental to this effort is the recognition that humans are more important than hardware and that quality is more important than quantity. Investments in weapons platforms and technologies solely for the purpose of enabling people to do the very difficult and dangerous things we ask of them.

The intent is to first select and train the extraordinary operators and then to provide them the most operationally relevant equipment. Language skills and regional knowledge are key to establishing effective relations with the foreign forces, organizations, and individuals with which SOF will interact.

The 1st Special Forces Group (SFG) language training program was recognized this year by the Army and DoD as the best of its kind but, although language training programs have been enhanced in recent years, SOF remain under-qualified in many key languages and dialects. USSOCOM continues to expand these programs, stressing the need for a few individuals to be thoroughly steeped in select languages and cultures. We have collectively termed these programs “Project Lawrence,” intended to produce individual regional expertise in support of a

persistent presence approach. Inspired by T.E. Lawrence of Arabia, these initiatives include an exploration of innovative options to permit specialization without sacrificing promotion opportunities.

There are two main reasons for doing this. One, of course, is to build the personal relationships that will get things done, and you cannot build a solid personal relationship through an interpreter or machine based translation. At least as important is the need to understand the environment deeply enough to be able to accurately predict the effects of our behavior.

USSOCOM has approximately 54,000 active duty, Reserve, and National Guard Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Department of Defense civilians assigned. Almost all of them are organized by service component: US Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) at Ft. Bragg, NC; the Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWARCOM) at Naval Base Coronado, CA; the Air Forces Special Operations Command (AFSOC) at Hurlburt Field, FL; and the Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command at Camp Lejeune, NC. A sub-unified command is the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) at Ft. Bragg, NC. And there is the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) at Hurlburt Field, FL.

Further, each geographic combatant command has a Special Operations Command that I support as a force provider. This is the catcher's mitt into which the deploying forces are pitched.

Last week United States Special Operations Forces were deployed in 74 different countries and foreign territories to the tune of about 11,000 personnel. Of note, 86% of the deployed SOF are deployed in the CENTCOM AOR (specifically in support of OIF/OEF).

USSOCOM is just one member of an interagency team. We wake up every day in Tampa with about 120 representatives of other agencies of the government who come to work in our headquarters. About 70 members of the United States Special Operations Command go to work inside the Washington DC beltway in other agencies of our government. About 200 more are in Interagency Task Forces overseas. This is really powerful. We have been doing this for a few years, so some of them are starting to work together in sequential assignments. Across our own government, we also use different processes and different terminology, so this is another form of culturally attuned engagement.

It is important to understand the world in which we live, or our operating environment, and what we think it may look like in the future. We have a process that helps us think about our operating environment. It is called Strategic Appreciation, and I like to emphasize that it is a way of thinking about the future world based on connections and trends – not a conclusion or an estimate. I won't take the time now to take you country-by-country or region-by-region around the world, but I'll tell you that the connections and trends that we watch paint a picture of a world that is ever more globalized and ever more chaotic. Crime, migration and extremism are on the rise and will become more important global factors. We see Westphalian states dominating the political construct, but non-state actors will compete more vigorously with nation-states for influence over populations. Sovereignty will remain a valid concept for

territorial integrity, but economic sovereignty, information sovereignty, and cultural sovereignty will be harder to protect. This will all be complicated by climate change, population growth, the emergence of unpredictable technologies, periodic economic crisis and the threat of failed states.

We see the probability of major military conflict between developed nations decreasing. Even if you accept that state-on-state confrontation is a realistic possibility, it is still probable that states will employ asymmetrical methods of warfare.

Fundamentally, as Americans, we see the United States as the frog in a pot, worried too much about getting speared while the heat is slowly increasing to the boiling point.

As the Nation's special operations force, we cannot do much to defend against the spear, but we can do a lot to turn down the global heat.

So...as proud as we are of our responsiveness to the sound of the guns, we recognize that it is more important to move ahead of the sound of the guns. The Department of Defense campaign strategy against terrorism is contained in Concept Plan (CONPLAN) 7500. Crafted at the United States Special Operations Command and approved by the Secretary of Defense it serves as both the guiding plan within the Department of Defense and the supporting plan in the interagency environment for combating violent extremist organizations. It is supported by regional plans crafted by each of the geographic combatant commanders around the world.

CONPLAN 7500 provides the framework for two approaches for influencing the behavior of our adversaries: the direct approach and the indirect approach. While the direct approach

focuses on isolating and defeating the immediate threat, mostly through military actions, the indirect approach focuses on shaping and influencing the environment. I'll state at the outset that these approaches must be conducted in balance – and that is the challenge.

The direct approach consists of those efforts to disrupt violent extremist organizations—the softer way of saying capture, kill, interdict and disrupt terrorists and terrorist networks to prevent them from harming us in the near term. The direct approach also denies access to and use of weapons of mass destruction by violent extremist organizations, many of whom have declared their intent specifically to acquire and use such weapons against us. These operations are conducted largely by the military; certainly, the DoD is in the lead for the direct approach. The direct approach is urgent, necessary, chaotic and kinetic, and the effects are immediate and mostly short-term.

While the direct approach will always be required, its overall effects are not decisive. The direct approach is a holding action that buys time for the indirect approach to achieve the decisive results. The indirect approach, includes enabling partners to combat violent extremist organizations by contributing to their capabilities through training, equipment, transfer of technology, and operational support. It includes efforts to deter tacit and active support for violent extremist organizations where the government is either unwilling or unable to remove terrorist sanctuaries. The indirect approach attempts to get at the underlying causes of transnational, non-state violence – economic depression, religious extremism and political intimidation and the like. Shaping and stabilizing the environment impacts the enemy in the long term. It is the concept of “draining the swamp” in which terrorist activity is cultivated.

Although the direct and indirect approaches are easily defined in theory, they are often difficult to distinguish in practice. People, units, and capabilities cannot be categorized as direct or indirect; only activities can be categorized as direct or indirect and only at the time they are occurring. Oftentimes, they are intertwined and occurring simultaneously. The military is in the lead in the direct approach; in the indirect approach, the U.S. military is, to a large degree, leading from behind. It is not our responsibility to lead it; it is our responsibility to support it. But much of the capacity, at least in the United States government, to conduct these kinds of operations, the train and assist kind of operations I mentioned earlier, and the humanitarian assistance kind of operations, resides within the Department of Defense. There is a balance between the two that has to be very, very carefully executed. This is where you'll find the core of special operations, in the balance of effective direct and indirect actions, the combination of high-tech tactical skills and low-tech human interaction, and an understanding of the operational context of their application.

One example of how the direct and indirect approaches to warfare work to achieve balanced effects can be seen in the counterinsurgency efforts being conducted by our Special Forces detachments in Afghanistan. During a recent deployment, the Special Operations Task Force, consisting of about 2,400 personnel accomplished the following. They conducted about 2,900 indirect type operations where the operation was expected to be non-kinetic (with no anticipation of an exchange of gunfire). Additionally, they conducted over 2,400 direct operations where they anticipated or experienced an exchange of gunfire. Over 3,400 enemies were killed. They also treated 50,005 local nationals in medical and dental clinics. They dropped 1.4 million pounds of aid and supplies in places that would not have otherwise

received any external support. They established 19 radio stations to better communicate with and among the local population and distributed almost 8,000 radios to ensure the broadcasts could be heard. They conducted a large number of construction and engineering projects, often in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). These projects, consisting of the construction of culverts, bridges, irrigation systems and school houses had a tremendous impact on the local population.

Throughout the same period, the same task force employed about 1,400 Afghans. They became dominant players in the local economy of the remote locations they occupied. Living inside a normal A-Camp, along with Special Forces A-teams, are typically 15 to 20 Americans, 100 Afghan police or security forces, and a handful of interagency representatives who are there for intelligence or aid purposes. The soldiers who live in the A-Camp leave base every day to engage with the local people, often through pre-arranged “shuras”, or organized meetings of local leaders. “What are the conditions here? How can we help? What do you know that we might want to know?” During this seven-month deployment, these detachments conducted 304 shuras. Often, they conducted military operations at night based on what they had learned – and then went back the next day to compensate for any damage that may have been done. Their security was in their local value – and presence without local value is perceived as occupation.

The key to success in the balanced approach to warfare is persistence.

The decisive effects of our nation’s persistent engagement with partners around the world can be seen in places like the Philippines, where for several years Special Operations

Forces have been advising and assisting the armed forces of the Philippines in their successful campaign against Al Qaeda associated Islamic insurgents in the southern islands. Even more pronounced are the effects of our nation's persistent partnership and military engagement in Colombia, where for over ten years, U.S. Special Operations Forces have been advising and assisting the armed forces of Colombia in the fight against the leftist Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC). In the last couple of years, the Colombian armed forces have dealt serious blows to the FARC, culminating with the rescue of U.S. and Colombian hostages in July 2008. That operation was completely planned, led and executed by the Colombians themselves, primarily by their special operations forces.

In October 2008, USSOCOM was designated as the Department of Defense proponent for Security Force Assistance (SFA), which makes us responsible for analyzing global needs for partner nation capacity building, and then making recommendations regarding force and resource allocation.

SFA and Threat Finance, another area for which SOCOM has been assigned proponenty, together offer opportunities beyond a whole-of-government approach to potentially include non-government and commercial entities. This team of teams is developing at an unprecedented pace as we find ourselves joined by common goals.

The concepts behind balancing the direct and indirect approaches in what amounts to a globally dispersed counterinsurgency effort are not new to how we conduct irregular warfare. Balanced warfare has been defined before:

Pure military skill is not enough. A full spectrum of military, para-military, and civil action must be blended to produce success. The enemy uses economic and political warfare, propaganda and naked military aggression in an endless combination to oppose a free choice of government, and suppress the rights of the individual by terror, by subversion and by force of arms. To win this struggle, our officers and men must understand and combine the political, economic and civil actions with skilled military efforts in the execution of this mission.

Those are President John F. Kennedy's words, spoken in a 1962 address to the U.S. Army Special Forces on the topic of what was then referred to as "Special Warfare."

Regardless of the name we use – special warfare, counterinsurgency warfare, irregular warfare, hybrid warfare – one thing is certain: it characterizes the nature of warfare we are experiencing, and will experience, for the foreseeable future. "Pure military skill" will not be enough. While the ability to conduct high-end, direct action activities will always remain urgent and necessary, it is the indirect approaches, working through and with others in building a global network of partners, that will have the most decisive and enduring effects.

The problems we must be prepared to address arise from the inability of nation states to deal with increasingly complex challenges or to meet the needs and expectations of their populations. These challenges are exacerbated by the growing number of non-state actors who have strategic effect in a networked and interconnected world. In the vacuum created by weak or failed governments, non-state actors have achieved greater influence over malleable populations by addressing their basic needs and grievances. And when government fails to

address needs of their populations, those populations will make choices shaped by today's ready access to global information. One of those choices is to turn to non-state organizations or groups that demonstrate state-like capacities to meet popular demands. The decay of nation states affects regional stability and empowers those who seek to violently impose their will on others.

If we can't prevent conflict, we will have to deal with it. In either case, your special operations forces are key to the effort.

I am ready to take any questions you may have.